

Permanent Workers from Greaves Cotton Ltd protest against termination

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Close to 100 permanent workers from Greaves cotton ltd. participated in the event organized by Democratic Trade Union Center (DTUC) to protest against the wrongful termination of 26 permanent workers in December 2013. The protest which was held in Chepauk, went on for an entire day during which the workers put forward a list of demands that they want the management to satisfy .

Greaves cotton ltd. is a manufacturing company which primarily makes Agro Products in it's unit located in Gummidipoondi, Chennai. It has 120 permanent workers (that includes staff) and 180 contract workers. Its Agro Products are Petrol / Kerosene – Engines, Petrol / Kerosene – Pumpsets, Diesel Pumpsets.

Maximum monthly salary of permanent workers who have worked for period as long as 15-20 years is Rs15,000. Minimum salary for permanent workers is in the range of Rs 9000 . The union representatives informed us that the contract workers get as less as 200 rupees a day and they do same amount of and same category of work as permanent workers.



Photo Credit: CP (ML) Peoples Liberation

Inspite of recording a 100 percent increase in profit over last year as per the [company website](#) , the company has refused to raise the wages of workers. In fact as was put to us by comrades present at the protest, in last five years there has been no wage increase. There are workers who have toiled for over fifteen years in the company and are now getting only 15,000 which is less then the minimum wage of 18,000 that they are entitled to as per the state government requirements.

According to the protesting workers, Greaves Cotton factory is an extremely hazardous work place. Many places lack ex-haust fans, and placement of machines in many places is inappropriate which restricts movements of

workers severely. According to Comrade Arumugaselvam, General Secretary, to date 10 cases regarding health hazards by the labour inspector himself against the factory! A large number of workers suffer from Aasthma and Tuberculosis and management has so far not paid any attention to these issues.

The factory did not have a union till 2013, when DTUC affiliated union was formed by the permanent workers in the factory. According to Comrade Chithambarathan who is the president of the union, management used a variety of tactics including intimidation to stop workers from unionising. However when the union was finally registered in August 2013, management fired 26 permanent workers who had led the unionization. These workers were still on probation when they were dismissed.

According to Comrade Arumugaselvam, the protracted negotiations between management and union started in December 2013 and went on for a year till late 2014 when they finally broke down. As per the Supreme Court ruling, once the negotiations break down, negotiation officer (labour inspector) has to send a note to Government notifying them about the breakdown in negotiations. After which under the Industrial Disputes Act, union can file the case.

However in this case it took the negotiating officer over 10 months to send the note to the State Government clearly hinting at irregularity in the whole process and finally, the case was filed under the ID Act only late last year. As Comrade Chidthambarathan put it “this is the condition of labour laws in our country. If some one steals from you, you can go and file a complaint in police station. But when a capitalist steals from a worker, the worker has to first negotiate, then wait for labour inspector to inform the state government, and only after all these formalities are completed is he even entitled to file a complaint” . This example clearly shows that even existing labour laws have so many loop holes which capitalists routinely exploit and reforming them further is only going to make things much worse for the working class.

During these protests, workers have put forward a series of demands to the management including,

- (1) Reinstating the twenty six workers.
- (2) Increase the wage for permanent workers to Rs 18000
- (3) Implement safety and security measures at the work place :

Since 2013, a total of 56 demands have been put forward by the union on behalf of the workers out of which not a single one has been satisfied! Comrade Chidthambarathan said that inspite of this, there has not reduced workers unity. He explained that negotiating demands on the part of workers is one aspect of what a union does. Another aspect in which this union (and unions in general) has succeeded is in building self esteem of the workers.

Prior to 2013, supervisors and management used to have an extremely aggressive and abusive attitude towards the workers. In fact, according to him, workers were frightened of the supervisors as even a small error used to result in insults and abuses. After the union has formed, the situation has exactly reversed. The shop floor is controlled by the workers. In fact according to the union representatives present at the protest, even management is afraid of the workers now. It is interesting to note that this shifting of power at the shop floor level post union

formation was also felt and emphasized by workers who were in Maruti Suzuki union at the Manesar plant.

Comrade Sathish from CP(ML), People's Liberation who spoke at the protest emphasized that Greaves cotton ltd. gets significant subsidies from the Government. In fact they used to have a construction unit which closed down last year after the Government stopped the subsidies. He also said how the company is also in the process of winding down this unit and is going to shift the entire production to their Ranipet unit which is currently only making automobile products.

According to DTUC representatives, the Ranipet factory has a pro-management union which has refused to support the DTUC union in their fight to re-instate the 26 expelled workers. According to Comrade Chidhambaranathan this is yet another loop hole in the labour laws where there is no legal provision that workers can take recourse to, to stop such shifting of units. He said that DTUC is considering roundabout routes via appealing to sales department e.g. and is trying to see if legally such a shift can be blocked.

Finally workers emphasized that in case the verdict of the court is not in their favour, they are fully prepared to go on a strike and will do every thing they can to make sure that their 26 expelled comrades are taken back. Workers also told us that the contract workers (due to their own problems including the ridiculously low wages) are eager to join the union and were even eager to participate in this protest. They were advised by the permanent workers to not do so , as otherwise they would have been instantly penalised by employment termination.

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